



# How to Understand Nutrition

(FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE)





بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful





Assalamu'alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu,

We pray that this message reaches you  
in good health and imaan.

On behalf of our AMAU Academy team, we would like  
to present to you these compiled notes that we have  
prepared to make your journey with us a lot easier.

Our notes are compiled by the AMAU Admin team  
and have not been comprehensively checked  
by a teacher.

If you find any errors or corrections that need  
to be made, kindly inform us via our email  
**helpdesk@amauacademy.com**

May Allah make our paths toward seeking  
beneficial knowledge easy and kindle our hearts  
with sincerity and gratefulness  
towards Him.

Jazakumullahu Khayran



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# Not everything is true

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*Chapter One*

The food we eat can impact not only our physical health but also our spiritual well-being, including our hifdh, the softness of our hearts, and even our ability to cry for the sake of Allah. Proper care of our bodies can help us worship Allah the best we can later in life.

There is a lot of medicinal information and advice that we are constantly being bombarded with. One ayah that emphasizes the importance of verifying information is:

1 يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْبِحُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ

**O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful.**

Surah Hujurat 6

Taking knowledge from various sources without verifying it can be confusing, misleading, or harmful. To protect ourselves and those around us, we must confirm information by seeking guidance from people of dhikr and knowledge.

Just like Islamic scholars, healthcare professionals' views may vary. It is essential to remember that not everything a healthcare professional says is necessarily true, as there may be underlying agendas at play. For instance, soda companies may sponsor studies about whether high-sugar soft drinks harm people.

All information mentioned here is provided for interest only and should be researched further or discussed with a medical professional.

# Weight

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*Chapter Two*

The first important thing to note is that weight doesn't look the same for every person. Even if someone is the same height and size as you, they may weigh differently due to athleticism, gender, age, genetics, muscle mass, food intake, stool, and water retention. For instance, a gym enthusiast with the same height and leanness as you may weigh more simply because they have more muscle mass, which is heavier than fat. Therefore, it is not realistic to compare your weight with others' most of the time.

# Water Retention is a major factor that affects weight

Weight can fluctuate from week to week, depending on the body's retention of water. High-sodium diets, approaching your menstrual cycle, intense exercise, and stress can all cause your body to retain water. The number on the scale isn't always the most reliable factor to determine your fitness, size, or muscularity. It is normal for body mass to fluctuate.

We can use our weight as a tool to understand our health better, but it is important to keep in mind that it only measures our body's mass. Weighing yourself every day and giving up on taking care of your health when your weight inevitably fluctuates is not beneficial.

**FOCUS ON LONG-TERM TRENDS**

**INSTEAD OF**

**DAY-TO-DAY DIFFERENCES**

More importance should be given to how you look in the mirror and how you feel. **Do you feel healthy and strong? Do you look lively? Does your body move in the way it should?** *These questions provide a more complete picture of your general health in comparison to just your weight alone.*



# Calories and Metabolism

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*Chapter Three*

Calories are units of energy provided by food or drink. To measure calories, a food sample is burned in an insulated, oxygen-filled chamber surrounded by water, called a bomb calorimeter. The heat produced from the burning raises the temperature of the water, which is then measured to determine the number of calories in the food.

While calories may be beneficial to keep track of, they are not always accurate. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) allows nutrition labels to be off by as much as 20 percent, and usually, the error is an undercount. For instance, if three people ate the same amount of calories each in fat, carbs, and protein, their results over time would vary greatly.

Calories do not account for everything, so they shouldn't be treated like they do. The way the body accepts and processes different forms of calories varies. But measuring is often better than not measuring at all. If one is trying to gain or lose weight and learn more about their body, counting calories can be a suitable place to begin.

**Human bodies** are *incredibly complex and intricately created by Allah,*

1

وفي أنفسكم أفلا تبصرون

**As there are within yourselves. Can you not see?**

Surah Adh-Dhariyat 21

Metabolism, like all bodily systems, is complicated and influenced by many factors, including genetics, diet, lifestyle, and physical activity. There are potential ways to speed up and slow down metabolism to achieve one's goals.

A common misconception regarding metabolism is that it alone determines weight gain or loss. Although how the body processes food may affect fat storage, blaming metabolism for weight gain is often inaccurate unless one has a metabolic disorder or disease.



# Carbohydrates

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*Chapter Four*

A

**Macronutrients**

These are nutrients that provide us with energy and maintain the body's systems. They are needed in larger quantities and include fat, protein, and carbohydrates.

B

**Micronutrients**

These nutrients are mostly vitamins and minerals and are equally critical but consumed in smaller amounts.

*Electrolyte micronutrients*, such as sodium chloride, potassium, magnesium, and phosphorus, are essential for keeping the body hydrated. Drinking 3L of water a day may not keep you hydrated if you are not consuming enough food or electrolytes. Too many electrolytes can also cause problems such as bloating, stomach cramps, water retention, and diarrhea.

Another deficiency worth mentioning is vitamin D deficiency. Many people, including Muslims, are deficient in vitamin D. Non-Muslim researchers may argue that Muslim women are deficient because they are commanded to stay at home and cover with hijab, but Islam is perfect and there is nothing harmful in Islam. Claims like these should be taken with suspicion.

Do these claims take into account lifestyle, genetics, and other factors that might be contributing to deficiencies? Even populations in the West are largely deficient. Regardless, it may be useful to get blood work done and see if you would benefit from supplementation.

**Carbohydrates** can be simple or complex and either sugars or starches. Carbs also include fibre. Contrary to popular diet culture belief, carbohydrates are not all bad. Carbs are the body's main source of quick energy. Simple carbs like sugar are quickly absorbed in the body and have a more pronounced effect than complex carbohydrates like potatoes.

The glycemic index is a marker of this process; it indicates how quickly your blood sugar will react depending on the carb you are eating. This is why not all carbs are the same - they all have different effects on the body depending on their constitution and what they are paired with.

**Fibre** can be soluble or insoluble. It is a carbohydrate but does not provide energy. The body doesn't break it down, rather it just goes in and out. Soluble fibre becomes a gel in the body and goes through the intestines. It helps with blood sugar and lowers cholesterol. Insoluble fibre brings water into the stool and intestines, which allows for easier passing.

It helps with insulin sensitivity, regulates the bowels, and may even reduce the risk of diabetes. Soluble fibre slows things down and insoluble fibre speeds things up. These two need to be in balance.



It is also worth mentioning that not all fibre is equal; some are fermentable, meaning they break down and produce gas in the body. For someone with a sensitive gut or irritable bowel syndrome, this would likely cause discomforts like stomach pain and bloating.

For dieting purposes, fibre is not considered a carbohydrate. This is because fibre cannot be turned into fat, so it doesn't contribute to weight gain. When reading the total carbs on the back of a packet, you can subtract any fibre or sugar alcohols on the label from the total carbohydrates to determine net carbs.

# Protein

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*Chapter Five*



**Protein is broken down into amino acids**, which are the building blocks of our bodies. Even if you are not trying to build muscle, protein is essential for your body's functioning. Protein helps you feel full, repairs muscle and reduces muscle loss. On average, a person needs to consume 0.8g of protein per kilogram of body weight daily.

Protein can be converted to glucose, but it is not the body's preferred method. Under most circumstances, protein doesn't have a noticeable effect on your blood sugar and does not turn into fat.

Although often looked down upon, fat is beneficial and essential to the body's function as well. Fat provides energy, helps produce hormones, protects your organs, and supports your cell function.

We can reduce certain types of fat to improve our health such as trans fat, but eliminating fat entirely like the low-fat industry may suggest is harmful to the body.

Fat only becomes an issue when combined with certain diets and lifestyles. People who may need to be more cautious include those who are sedentary, have blocked arteries or cholesterol issues, and eat heavily processed foods. Fat is something to be mindful of, not to run away from. Many things that we hear are inherently "bad" like fats, carbs, and cholesterol are actually needed by the body, just in balance.

There are two types of fat: white fat and brown fat. Brown fat is more active and easily burned. Higher levels of brown fat compared to white fat are usually healthier and are related to lower instances of high blood pressure and heart disease.

# Hormones

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*Chapter Six*



Hormones are chemical messengers in your body that travel through tissues and organs in your bloodstream. They work slowly over time and affect many different processes in your body, such as growth and development, metabolism, energy, skin, and mood.

The first hormone we will discuss is related to **diabetes**, and that is insulin. Insulin is a hormone created by your pancreas that controls the amount of glucose in your bloodstream at any given moment. It also helps to store glucose in the liver, fat, and muscles.

Insulin sensitivity describes how sensitive the body is to the effect of insulin. If someone is insulin sensitive, they need less insulin to lower their blood sugar. We want to be insulin sensitive because being desensitized to insulin leads to diabetes. Type 1 diabetes occurs when your pancreas is not functioning properly, but type 2 diabetes can often be reversed. It is largely a condition that is a result of a person's lifestyle.

***The opposite of insulin is cortisol.*** It is a steroid hormone produced in several glands in your body. Cortisol affects many processes in your body, including stress response, metabolism, blood sugar, blood pressure, and sleep. We need some cortisol or stress to maintain our functions. Stress isn't all bad, after all, the concept of exercise is based on good stress. Chronic or systemic stress, on the other hand, can be harmful. Cortisol counterbalances insulin. We want a balance of both insulin and cortisol.

IGF-1 and growth hormones help spur growth in children and adolescents and regulate body composition, body fluids, muscle, bone growth, sugar and fat metabolism, and maybe even heart function. Children and adolescents have a natural ability to lose weight and increase lean muscle because of these hormones.

It is also worth mentioning that in men, body fat reduces testosterone, the male hormone, and converts it into estrogen, the female hormone. Women naturally produce a very small amount of testosterone. Because of this, women do not have to worry about becoming bulky when picking up weight lifting.

# Autophagy and Ketosis

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*Chapter Seven*

Autophagy is your body's process of reusing old and damaged cell parts. Cells are the basic building blocks of every tissue and organ in your body, each containing multiple parts that keep it functioning. Over time, these parts can become defective or stop working.

When the body is building and functioning, waste is produced. Autophagy is the body's way of cleaning up and preventing things like tumours and cancers. Your body is capable of protecting itself from all sorts of illnesses, but it is either building or cleaning. Bodybuilders who eat every two hours and even wake up from their sleep to eat have very little autophagy going on.

Autophagy occurs during sleep, but it is also strongly connected to fasting. The longer you fast, the higher your autophagy is. It has been proven in mice that autophagy may increase during intermittent fasting.

Ketosis is a metabolic state where your body burns fat for energy instead of glucose. The keto diet has benefits and has been associated with weight loss, increased energy, and helping illnesses like epilepsy. Your brain seems to prefer ketones for energy over glucose, though the brain works fine on glucose as well as the Prophet ﷺ used to eat dates and the like.



# Gut Microbiome and BMI

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*Chapter Eight*

Now we come to the gut microbiome. Your body is full of trillions of bacteria, viruses, and fungi, most of which are found in a particular pocket of your intestine. The gut microbiome affects all kinds of things in the body, including weight behaviour, mood, depression, and more.

The food you eat affects which bacteria become dominant or dormant in your gut. What you put in changes the balance of your bacteria. Certain types of soluble fibre, for instance, can act like prebiotics. Probiotics and prebiotics help, but ultimately, your gut health comes down to what you eat. Eating a wide variety of colourful fruits and vegetables, for instance, leads to good bacteria in the gut.

FODMAP stands for fermentable oligosaccharides, disaccharides, monosaccharides, and polyols, which are short-chain carbohydrates that the small intestine absorbs poorly. Some people experience digestive distress after eating them.

The FODMAP diet exists to remove these symptoms and is often used to treat IBS patients. It is a temporary diet in which one tests what irritates their system and concludes what in their diet should be reduced or eliminated to support their health.

BMI or body mass index is a measure of body fat based on height and weight that applies to adult men and women. As noted with regards to weight earlier, BMI can be an inaccurate way to measure someone's health because someone can be over or underweight on the BMI scale but still be healthy. BMI does not take into account body composition.



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